

# *To the Lighthouse & Music*

## Discussion Questions

1. 'Rhythm' is an important, repeated word in *To the Lighthouse*. How many different types of rhythm can you find mentioned in the novel? Can the novel's structure or prose style be described as 'rhythmic' in any way?
2. Why are the characters' words and voices often compared to music? Does this comparison invite us to read or 'hear' the novel in a particular way?
3. E. M. Forster described *To the Lighthouse* as a 'novel in sonata form' (i.e. a piece of classical music in three parts: exposition, development, recapitulation). Why would Forster have compared the novel to a piece of music and to 'sonata form' specifically?
4. In section 9 of 'The Window' Lily tries to 'start the tune of Mrs Ramsay in her head.' How do music and sound contribute to the novel's interest in memory?
5. In 'The Window', part 7, Mrs Ramsay compares her marriage to 'two notes sounding together'. What does this image tell us about Mrs Ramsay as a character? Do you think the novel encourages us to see this as a positive view of marriage?
6. Most references to music in the novel are unspecific and only one piece of music (the ballad 'Sam Hall', in part 14 of 'The Window') is explicitly identified. Why is this, do you think?
7. The 'old cradle song' mentioned in 'The Window' (section 3) is probably the Skye Boat Song, recounting Bonnie Prince Charlie's flight from Scotland after his defeat by English troops at Culloden. *To the Lighthouse* was written during the English folk music revival, a movement that was often patriotic and nationalist. How does this song contribute to the novel's representation of Anglo-Scottish relations and of nationalism generally?
8. In 'Time Passes', Mrs McNab and Mrs Bast sing as they clean the house. We are told their song had been popular in 'music halls' (the commercialised venues for comic, cosmopolitan and often bawdy entertainment). How does this detail contribute to their characterisation, and to the novel's politics (of class, gender and nationality)?
9. In section 3 of 'The Window' Mrs Ramsay hears the waves that sound to her like 'a ghostly roll of drums [that] remorselessly beat the measure of life'. This detail may be intended to evoke the First World War: can you find other examples of the sounds of war in the novel?